Medicine

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/19764637.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings, No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Mao Mao: Heroes of Pure Heart (Cartoon)
Relationship:	Badgerclops & Mao Mao
Characters:	Badgerclops, Mao Mao
Additional Tags:	May or may not add more I don't know
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-07-11 Words: 2,438 Chapters: 1/1

Medicine

by Cephalosaur

Summary

Mao Mao doesn't love himself as much as he lets on.

Notes

Features self-loathing and prescribed medication.

Disgusting. And you call yourself a hero.

It was the same every time he took a shower.

He will hesitate to get in because it meant being fully undressed--he may not wear pants, but he's not willing to relinquish the clothes he has--then he will stand there continuously switching back and forth between scorching hot water that burned his skin and freezing ice water that made him shake so badly he thought his spine would crawl out of his skin. Then he will hesitate to get out because it meant facing the mirror over the sink, a punishment he could not avoid no matter what he tried. He's tried wrapping his towel around his face until he left the bathroom, but then his roommate(s) will ask him why he had a towel on his face, and then he has to come up with some excuse besides, "Because I hate my face and I don't want to look at it."

Now he was standing in front of the mirror, his towel on his face, his heart pounding at the thought of seeing what lay underneath. His stomach was considering becoming a professional athlete, jumping hurdles and performing gut-twisting gymnastics. His ears were burning but his face and the back of his head were cold. Water was still dripping on his back and his legs, dampening his fur and making the floor wet. The pads of his feet were the coldest, icy pain tingling and feeling like he cut his skin. But his arms were tired, and he could not hold the towel over his face anymore.

Slowly, do it slowly.

Inch by inch, he let his arms slowly move down his face, back to his sides. Slowly, because if he had to see his whole face at once, he would probably go into shock.

In a moment his eyes were uncovered and he could see the train wreck for himself. He could see his fur, black like the rest of his family. But his sisters' fur was silky and beautiful; his was not. His was unwashed no matter how many times he bathed, and disgusting--matted with dirt and blood, sticky and uneven, missing in the places where he was scarred. He didn't need to be reminded of the tuft of fur on his behind where his tail should be, which always felt the worst of it all. It was the spot where he landed when he was knocked backward and fell on his backside into the dirt or the concrete.

He could see where his ears had been nicked many times. They were minuscule, and you would miss them if you weren't close enough, but they were there. You could see the scars near his skull where his ears were once pierced and how the earrings had gotten painfully ripped off his head. They weren't unlike the scars on his waist and abdomen, but the ones further down were larger. He could still remember how he got them like it was yesterday, the way he interacted with his family and how they never seemed to hesitate to use their claws on him, no matter how young he was.

Of course, there were his eyes as well. At least half of his family had green eyes, but his was not like theirs. His sisters had beautiful green eyes, beautiful and pleasant but still sharp, perfectly reflecting their fierce warrior natures and how they could all kill a man with their bare hands. But Mao Mao didn't have beautiful green eyes. His green eyes were putrid, a hue

infected by a shade of yellow and strongly resembling vomit. They made him look poisoned by toxic waste and it was taking its effects upon his eyes and his brain.

Disgusting. And you're supposed to be Pure Heart Valley's "beloved hero."

At once he felt a gagging sensation and he gripped the edge of the sink, suddenly unwell, struggling to fill his lungs with air. His stomach that had only been jumping hurdles and performing gymnastics routines were now doing all these things while plummeting from the stratosphere, with a head-splitting migraine.

It was too hot in there. Why was it so hot? Is this a sauna, a volcano? Why would I be in a place like this? Why, why, why . . . ?

"Hahaha! Do it again, Badgerclops!"

His ears twitched. From the living room he could hear his roommates, Adorabat and Badgerclops, laughing and enjoying themselves. He easily recognized Adorabat's familiar, child-like giggles and Badgerclops's deeper, calm and relaxed laughter ringing through the whole house.

Despite his shaking, he inhaled deeply and pushed himself off of the counter. *No, everything is fine. I'm home, and that's all that matters.*

He looked at himself in the mirror one last time. His matted and messy black fur, his sickly green eyes, his scarred skin . . .

Everything is fine.

Mao Mao held his used towel in his hands before he wrapped it into a ball shape and threw it into the laundry hamper on the other side of the room. It became unwrapped in the air but it still landed over the metal tube of the basket. *Hmm.*

He stepped out of the bathroom into the unoccupied bedroom. It was the same as it had been when he first went to take a shower that evening. It was night, with light from the moon shining in through the window, leaving shapes of pale light on the floor. Even without the moon, the lights from the bathroom and the bedroom lamp were on, leaving a warm orange glow in their surroundings. The bunk bed was untouched, lonely but peaceful with no one sleeping in it. He could see all of his weapons still stockpiled on the bottom bunk, scattered on the bedsheets and stuck in the crevices between the mattress and the wooden frame. The sweatshirt he left was still there, lying over his pillow and undisturbed.

Walking up on his toes, moving with precision and accuracy, there was only the soft creaking of the floor and the ongoing noise and laughter from the living room.

For a moment, when he reached the bunk bed, he only stared at the hoodie he left behind. He remembered how Badgerclops wanted him to wash his cape and other clothing items and how he grabbed the sweatshirt from one of his drawers to put on when he was finished bathing.

He had the hoodie for many years now, but it still didn't fit him, still large on his small torso, but that was okay. It was comfortable like this. The body of it was off white, slightly grey, with a dark grey hood and three thick, colored stripes on the sleeves, and the drawstrings were ripped up from being chewed on. Despite being worn and old, it was still soft to the touch, a sensation he wanted all over his body. It was truly wonderful, to endure a half hour of torture and hatred upon himself, to then be blessed with the comfort of wearing a simple article of clothing. But it wasn't just clothes; it felt, it smelled--it *looked* like happiness. He had so many fond memories with this sweatshirt, even on the day he first got it. It was what he needed.

Touching the fabric gingerly with his fingertips, he decided he's had enough hesitation for today. He wrapped his hands around the bottom edge, lifting up and slipping it on over his head. Instantly he was filled with warm happiness all over. It was loose but at the same time it hugged him like an old friend. All of his scars and most of his gross fur were hidden away by knit fabric, and the hood helped hide his eyes. He couldn't help but smile like this; everything was okay--the phrase he has said before, the one he thought was a lie and was forcing himself to believe, was now but a truth.

It was warm nostalgia, and the smell was familiar. It reminded him of sunshine on a brisk morning while the cherry blossom trees were in bloom.

Just like Mom.

What?

Mao Mao paused. Where did that come from? His ears twitched as he looked around the room. He was still alone here, not unless there were ghosts inhabiting this plot of land, so what was that? Actually . . . What was that? He remembered an odd feeling from a moment ago, but he couldn't remember what it was. No matter how he struggled, he couldn't recall what happened. Why would that be? *It was almost as if something was keeping him from remembering.*

He shook his head, ridding it of all those unpleasant thoughts. It was too late at night to be worrying about this nonsense, and his friends were waiting for him to join in their fun.

He hurried out of the bedroom without it seeming like he was running away from something, more like he couldn't wait to be with his loved ones. In only a few seconds he was in the living room where Adorabat and Badgerclops were watching television.

"Oh, there you are," his larger friend observed, warmly smiling at him to show that he was welcomed.

"Sorry I'm late," Mao Mao apologized sheepishly, nervously rubbing the back of his head as he padded over to the couch to sit beside them. "Did I miss anything?"

"Nope, the movie's just starting!" Adorabat reassured him.

True to her word, they all saw the title of the film flash across the screen.

Cheers of excitement were made as the movie began playing. One bowl of popcorn was shared among three friends and whatever candy any of them had, as well as the laughter when something funny happened. It was a blissful experience, that is, if Mao Mao could remember half of it.

Oh yes, he could remember playfully teasing Badgerclops when he had chocolate smeared on his face and Adorabat falling asleep before the end and having her rest in his lap. He could remember when he had a coughing fit from laughing and when his friends asked if he was okay, he said he choked on the lightly-salted popcorn. But he couldn't remember the actual movie; he couldn't remember the title from almost two hours ago, or the major conflict. He even struggled with remembering the resolution at the end.

Why would this happen?

No, no, no, no, no. It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. The only thing that should mean anything to him was that he was spending time with Badgerclops and Adorabat, two individuals that he dearly loved. To be able to smile and laugh with them at all was a blessing and he should cherish it.

When the film was over, the television was turned off and Adorabat was beginning to wake up, but she was still tired, yawning with droopy eyelids.

"You should go to bed, Adorabat," Badgerclops told her. "We'll join you in a sec."

"Okay, g'night." She let out another sleepy yawn as she flew to the bedroom, where they both knew she would sleep as she roosted from below the top bunk bed.

Mao Mao watched in that direction for a moment, the realization that he would have to go back in there slowly dawning on him, but he couldn't watch for long. As soon as she was out of sight, Badgerclops wrapped his big hands around his thin arms and led him to the kitchen area. He stood idly as he watched his cyborg friend reach into one of the cabinets and pull out a small orange bottle with tiny capsules inside. He turned around and set the bottle on the table before he got a glass out as well, filling it with tap water and placing it beside the bottle. Finally, he sat down at the table and folded his hands, smiling at him expectantly.

The young black cat had to resist rolling his eyes or groaning. There was no way out of this, not with the look he was giving him. He knew that look far too well after seeing it for years. It was a look that told him, *"Neither of us are leaving this room until you swallow these pills."* And something also told him that he was not able to get away with hiding them under his tongue and spitting them out later--probably because he had tried that before, and now that was why Badgerclops insisted on watching him from then on.

There was no point in trying to fight him, it was another fact he knew all too well.

He sat down at the table across from him and opened the bottle, dumping two of the little capsules in his hand. He grimaced before he forced them both into his mouth and down his throat. Badgerclops kept smiling at him, even after he gagged and dropped his face onto the table. Despite his reaction, he still reached over and gently pet him on the head, a reward for taking his medicine.

Ordinarily such a gesture was a comfort, but not tonight. Mao Mao pushed himself off the table and on uneasy legs. “I . . . I think I’ll go to bed too.” Before he could leave, Badgerclops arose from his chair himself and wrapped an arm around him, giving him a squeeze.

“I love you, man,” he said to him, smiling at him. But he knew he was concerned, the way his grin couldn’t reach his eyes and the way his hand gripped his body tighter than he would have normally.

But Mao Mao couldn’t do it. He couldn’t tell either of them how much he loved and needed them, how he wouldn’t be able to go at it alone. He couldn’t tell them how much he missed his sisters and his parents after he hadn’t seen them in years.

The only thing he could do was embrace Badgerclops briefly before leaving to join Adorabat in slumber.

His legs were weak as he walked back to the bedroom. Maybe he was tired, maybe he was afraid of being in that room with the silence again, but no matter the reason, he almost collapsed trying to get to his bed before he rolled on top of the covers. His legs brushed against the weapons at the foot of the bed as he lie on his back, watching his slender fingers open and close his fist.

These weak, disgusting hands. Too much of a coward to say anything. Can’t even see his own family.

As he drifted off, a single tear rolled down his cheek.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!